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# INSIDE THE SOVIET ZONE

**S**INCE the end of the war, untrue stories about the conduct of the Soviet authorities in Germany and Eastern Europe have been going around. Many British newspapers have helped to spread these rumours by publishing, from time to time, sensational news items which, when investigated, prove to be absolutely without any truth whatsoever.

This pamphlet is intended to help to clear the air by taking a number of the more frequent charges made against the Soviet authorities, and answering them by quotations from the reports of responsible eye-witnesses on the spot.

## I. THE CHARGES ANSWERED

### *Is there an Iron Curtain round East Europe?*

"I can speak with experience of 3,000 miles of motoring in and out of various countries of 'Russian Europe.' I was armed with no special credentials. . . . I chanced my luck on my passport and explained frankly at the frontiers and road blocks exactly where I was going and what I meant to do when I got there. In this way, in the last five months, I have been twice to Czechoslovakia, six times in and out of the Russian zone of Austria, four times in Hungary, twice in Yugoslavia, and once to Bulgaria."

PETER SMOLLETT, *Daily Express*, 20-12-45.

"Although I carried a pass permitting my passage across the Russian zone to Berlin, I was never called upon to produce it; nor was my car stopped on entering the Russian zone, or anywhere within it."

PETER BURCHETT, *Sunday Express*, 6-1-46.

### *Can British and American Observers move freely in the Soviet zone?*

"Once past the Russian road block, which is usual at the exits of each capital, I found I could drive round everywhere in the country concerned."

PETER SMOLLETT, *Daily Express*, 20-12-45.

"Each British search party consisted of a British officer, an interpreter and a driver, and they spent nine days in the provinces of Thuringia and Saxony respectively. The parties were conducted by Russian officers who arranged every facility for them to make their enquiries both by personal interviews and search of records. . . ."

*The Times*, 19-1-46.

"We were allowed to question German and Russian officials at all levels. Although our tour was

supervised, every request we made was instantly granted, whether for talks with Soviet Military Government officers and German administrative chiefs or for visits to German factories, workers' flats and places of entertainment. No attempt was made to prevent our talking freely with Germans we met."

*Daily Telegraph*, 21-1-46.

"Information has been freely given and all reasonable requests granted."

DENIS MARTIN, writing from Dresden, *Daily Mirror*, 21-1-46.

"It is absurd for people to say that the Russians showed me only what they wanted me to see. I went where I willed and it would have been impossible for the Russian officials to organise such a tour in 24 hours . . ."

NORMAN DODDS, M.P., in speech at Dartford, quoted in *Russia Today News-Letter*, 10-11-45.

### *Is the Red Army badly behaved?*

"Cases of misconduct by Red Army men are now comparatively rare. Those responsible for them are almost exclusively deserters (or else Germans and others masquerading in stolen Red Army uniform), and they are ruthlessly punished by the Soviet Military Authorities."

"When I was going to Bratislava, I was warned by our Press attaché in Prague, who had been there about a fortnight earlier, that I would find it dangerous to walk about at night there, on account of the Red Army."

"Well, I found myself walking back to my hotel at any time between midnight and four o'clock in the morning. My hosts never expressed anxiety for my safety when I left, with my wife; none of the other guests seemed at all reluctant to walk home; and none of the numerous Red Army men whom we encountered showed the slightest sign of wanting to molest us."

COMMANDER EDGAR P. YOUNG, R.N., in *Russia Today News-Letter*, 24-11-46.

"In Berlin the same sort of gossip was rampant. To go out in Berlin after dark was to take your life in your hands. Unintentionally I made a practical test. I was lost for an hour in Berlin after curfew. During an hour's motoring round and round, with occasional stops to get out and explore, I saw only one man . . . so much for the dangers of Berlin. I prefer it to the London black-out."

MAJOR PHILIP GRIBBLE, *News Chronicle*, 1-10-45.

"A few days ago I drove into Traisen, in the Soviet zone of Austria, to find two former S.S. men being tried before a military tribunal of the Red Army.

"They admitted in open Court that they had dressed up in Red Army uniforms and staged a series of looting expeditions with the deliberate purpose of getting the Russians a bad name. They said that this kind of activity had been planned as part of the Werewolf operations while the war was still going on. There was a showdown in Vienna the other day when the Austrian police arrested a black market king who had a fleet of contraband lorries doing the Bucharest, Budapest and Vienna run. The trucks were driven by Rumanian and Hungarian Nazis in Soviet uniforms."

PETER SMOLLET, *Daily Express*, 20-12-45.

## Are the Russians involved in the Black Market?

"The Russians have cleaned up the Black Market in their zone, but it has now moved into the British zone in the Tiergarten, near the Brandenburger Tor."

MAJOR PHILIP GRIBBLE, *News Chronicle*, 1-10-45.

"The British Chief of Berlin's military police, Lieutenant-Colonel T. C. Irvine, is tonight under arrest in a house in the British zone of Germany. Another British officer has been detained, and more arrests are expected hourly. Since his arrest, officers of the Special Investigation Department, detached from Scotland Yard, have opened an all-out drive to clean up Berlin's Black Market."

*Daily Mirror*, 21-12-45.

## Is the Russian Zone inefficient?

"One's first impression is of efficient administration. The zone is run on broadly similar lines to those administered by the other Allies.

"Local government is beginning to run smoothly again after the inevitable disruption caused by the weeding-out of Nazi officials. Shattered towns are recovering. As in the British zone, despite difficulties, food and fuel are sufficient to maintain life. Crime is decreasing, schools and hospitals are working, epidemics are held in check. Light industries are recovering with surprising rapidity."

*Daily Telegraph*, 21-1-46.

"The Russians are doing an efficient job of military Government—in some respects more efficient than the Americans. The Russians were far ahead in purging the public administration of Nazis."

GLADWIN HILL of *New York Times*, quoted in *Evening Standard*, 27-12-45.

## Are the Russians stripping their Zone?

"Light industries are recovering with surprising rapidity. In Saxony, where many factories were dismantled for reparations, production is already 30 to 35 per cent of normal."

*Daily Telegraph*, 21-1-46.

"Industry, farming and mining, five American Correspondents reported, are largely under the control of German provincial governments, aided and supported by Russian military government. The

German Government leaders told the Correspondents that the programme was progressing satisfactorily. . . . In industrial Saxony people complained of the collection of reparations which they called 'plundering.'"

*The Times*, 27-12-45.

## Are the Russians unfriendly?

"Throughout the trip the Russians treated us with traditional hospitality. Comradeship forged in battle, and friendship found spontaneous expression everywhere."

*Daily Telegraph*, 21-1-46.

"Throughout their journey the parties (British search parties) were shown every courtesy, and were entertained by the Russians free of charge."

*The Times*, 19-1-46.

## Are the Germans starving in the Russian Zone?

"... In industrial Saxony people complained of the scarcities of food and clothing. . . . Food schedules are being met. They range from 2,160 calories daily for the heaviest labour to 1,178 calories for housewives and persons in unessential labour. There are free markets in the Russian zone where peasants are permitted to sell 30 per cent of their production, and in contrast with Germans in Berlin and in the West, people in the Russian zone get a coal ration."

*The Times*, 27-12-45.

"German civilians look as well-dressed and well-fed as in the British zone."

*Daily Telegraph*, 21-1-46.

## II. WHERE THE SLANDERS COME FROM

"More than once I found Germans who were thinking in terms of a war between the Allies. Far too many were eager to spread horrific tales about the Russians . . ."

*The Times*, 27-11-45.

"When I was going to Bratislava . . . I was warned by our Press attaché in Prague . . . that I would find it dangerous to walk about at night on account of the Red Army . . ."

COMMANDER EDGAR P. YOUNG, *Russia Today Newsletter*, 24-11-45.

"It is natural that the occupying forces should to some extent absorb . . . German anti-Bolshevik propaganda."

MAJOR PHILIP GRIBBLE, *News Chronicle*, 1-10-45.

"It is something of a shock to find the outlook so little changed—to find the same post-Munich ideas being spread that Britain and Germany should together fight Russia."

PETER BURCHETT, *Sunday Express*, 6-1-46.

"I found no difficulty in getting people to talk in East Europe. The trouble is to stop them—particularly those who are anti-Soviet."

PETER SMOLLETT, *Daily Express*, 20-12-46.



"Prior to his visit (to the Soviet zone) he attended a Press conference in Berlin at which a Colonel Thickness told reporters of millions of displaced persons wandering hopeless, starving and lost in the Russian zone, riddled with every imaginable disease.

"Then I began to learn the truth," said Mr. Dodd, "seeing with my own eyes all that was going on. What I saw was absolutely contrary to all the stories I had read and heard."

MR. NORMAN DODD, M.P., reporting his visit to the Soviet zone, speech at Crayford, *Daily Worker*, 16-10-45.

*"A Red Army Court at Eberswalde, in the Russian zone, near Berlin, has passed sentence of death or imprisonment on members of a German gang who, wearing Russian military uniform terrorised the neighbourhood. It was stated at the trial that the men also used a few words of Russian while committing their misdeeds to heighten the suspicion that Russian soldiers were responsible. Eleven men were sentenced to death, and two others and one woman to imprisonment."*

*The Times*, 9-1-46.

## Reconstruction of Industry

"Radical economic changes are being pressed forward in their (the Soviet) zone. Industry as a whole is working at 25 per cent of the 1936 level. Land reform under the watchword 'Junkers' lands in peasants' hands' is going forward; and the old private banks have been turned over to public ownership."

*The Times*, 27-11-45.

"Twenty million Germans under Marshal Zhukov's military administration are on the threshold of industrial and agrarian revolutions destined to play a vital part in the development of the post-war Reich.

"Reconstruction of houses, factories, transport systems and cultural centres is proceeding at a pace well in advance of that set by the Powers in Western Germany. Eighty million marks—over £7,000,000 at the 1939 rate of exchange—have been set aside for the reconstruction of Dresden . . ."

DENIS MARTIN, *Daily Herald*, 21-1-46.

## Giving the Land to the People.

"Peasants optimistically predicted that, instead of their former starvation pay, they will be making a thousand marks a year before long. For example, Werner Schiewald, aged 32, worked on an estate for 19 years for about fourpence an hour. Now he is a proud landowner, living with his wife and five children in a two-storey wooden house. He has 12½ acres of rich farm land, a plough, a harrow, a cow, a pig, a colt, six sheep, 12 chickens and a small amount of fertiliser. All this, he says, will be enough to provide a good living.

"Distribution is done by a committee of local farmers, democratically chosen, which works closely with the provincial authorities.

"Land reform in the Russian zone, however, has been no problem for a few of the Junkers. For example, when Erich Reinhardt lost his big estate

near Weissenfels in Eastern Germany, he merely moved over to his 500-acre estate near Hamburg in the British zone where no such measures exist."

CHARLES ARNOT, *Reynolds News*, 30-12-45.

"Under the programme for agrarian reform the German governments, with the approval of the Soviet authorities, have redistributed 7,000 Junker estates of more than 247 acres each among 281,155 new holders. Each new holder received from 12 to 19 acres. For these he must pay the Government. There has also been a redistribution of livestock and tools."

*The Times*, 27-12-45.

## Restoring Democracy

"Under the terms of the Potsdam Agreement the Russians allow and encourage the operation of democratic political parties. Trade unions—formed on a general and not craft basis—have 600,000 members in Saxony alone. Unlike those formed in the West they are at liberty to negotiate wages and working conditions with the Russian authorities."

DENIS MARTIN, *Daily Herald*, 21-1-46.

"The Russians have encouraged the speedy formation of the four anti-fascist political parties from the top downwards, from Berlin outwards."

*The Times*, 27-11-45.

"Factories and mines are operated by boards of directors and representatives of workers' councils who are completely organised in one big vertical union of many divisions."

*The Times*, 27-12-45.

"It is perhaps in their attitude towards German political parties that the three occupying Powers have diverged most. The Russians have from the first encouraged the development and activity of four major anti-Nazi parties—two of the centre and two of the left—in their zone. The Americans have restricted spontaneous German political activity, but have set up in their zone three major German 'Governments' without any representative character. The British are beginning tentatively to encourage political parties, but no broad pattern has yet begun to emerge in the British zone."

*The Times*, 28-11-45.

## III. HOW THE SLANDERS ARE SPREAD

### The case of the British Co-operative representatives.

In this example, the newspapers worked up a great scare concerning some British Co-operative representatives as follows:

"FIVE BRITISH CO-OP. LEADERS DETAINED BY RUSSIANS."

"Five British Co-operative leaders, on a fraternal mission to Poland, are being detained by the Russian commander of Poznan airfield.

"Their plane had been forced down by bad weather."

"With their pilot and co-pilot they were taken to the Hotel Continental where, the pilot says, they are being held under Russian guard."  
*Daily Herald*, Associated Press message, 29-10-45.

Other typical headlines:

"NEW CO-OP. PEER HELD BY RUSSIANS AT POZNAN."  
*News Chronicle*, Associated Press message, 29-10-45.

"BRITISH PLANE IS FORCED DOWN, CO-OP. MEN HELD BY RUSSIANS, INCLUDING NEW PEER."

*Daily Mail*, Associated Press message, 29-10-45.

The stories published by the papers were full of "details," such as:

"The British Ambassador in Warsaw, Mr. Victor Cavendish-Bentinck, immediately sent out a protest to the Polish Government," and "The Russian commander of the aerodrome at the western edge of Poznan has repeatedly taken the position that the area is still in a 'state of war,' and that any plane intending to land must give 24 hours' advance notice and similar notice before departing." (*Associated Press*.)

On the same day, the evening papers added more detail:

"Diplomatic moves are being made to secure the release of the five British Co-operative leaders . . .

"An official of the Co-operative Union told me today that they were in touch with the Foreign Office and hoped to hear of the delegation's speedy release." (*Evening News*, 29-0-45.)

(Note the nameless "official." This "character" often appears when no real facts are available.)

The same evening, the truth was told. The five Co-operative leaders had not been detained or held up at all. They had been forced down by bad weather (the only bit of truth in the whole story), they went through the customary formalities and then proceeded to Warsaw where they kept their first appointment on time.

Without checking the original message, the newspapers took the story and blew it up into a sensation, using big headlines.

The following day, the majority of the papers failed to publish the true facts, and in other cases tacked the correction away in a corner. As a result, millions of people may still be wondering what happened to the Co-op leaders.

### The case of the "refugee flood."

In this case, the newspapers carried sensational headlines about an order which had never been given by the Soviet authorities. Here are typical examples:

"REFUGEES CROWD INTO BRITISH ZONE 4,000,000 ON BORDER AND FOOD IS ALREADY SHORT."

*News Chronicle*, 5-11-45.

"British officials are anxiously awaiting the possible flood of hundreds of thousands of

Germans into the British zone within the next few hours. There is a queue nearly 7½ miles long waiting to come over."

*Daily Herald*, 5-11-45...

"A statement is likely to be made in the House of Commons" (*Daily Telegraph*, 5-11-45). "A complete report is being sent to the British Cabinet" (*Daily Mail*, 5-11-45). "Our Ally has consulted nobody. The action taken without reference to British or American capacity to cope with the consequences" (*The Star*, 5-11-45).

The next day, the "*Daily Worker*" carried the true story which showed that a translator, listening to the radio in Berlin, garbled the message he was taking down.

That some mistake had been made by the translator should have been clear to anyone familiar with the situation, because it contradicted other events taking place at the same time.

Nevertheless, without bothering to check with the Soviet authorities, the British press acted as judge and jury on the flimsy evidence provided by an inefficient radio translator and with one accord (except for the *Daily Worker*) pronounced the Soviet authorities guilty in screaming headlines.

Once the truth was told, the newspapers should have made some apology for jumping to the wrong conclusion. Not so.

"The mass evacuation," wrote the *News Chronicle* (6-11-45), "has been cancelled following representations to the Russian authorities."

"Rumours of a sudden spate of expulsions from the Russian zone were not confirmed yesterday," said the *Daily Telegraph* (6-11-45), but "There is, however, still some obscurity in the position."

And that was that. The result is, again, that millions of people have an idea, completely incorrect, that the Russians have driven thousands of Germans into the British zone purely out of a desire to make things difficult for the British.

## IV. THE TRUE POSITION

### Purging the Nazis

"There has been a ruthless purge of Nazi leaders and active members of the party in every city, town and village in the zone, but the Germans who were "inactive" Nazis are in most cases allowed to keep their jobs. They are given plenty of opportunities to rehabilitate themselves under the watchful eye of the Red Army.

"The Russian authorities have even turned over the responsibility of weeding out active Nazis to the German civil administration. A German officer studies each case individually and decides whether a person was an active party member or merely a nominal member. The head of the German administration in Saxony said: 'All war criminals and active Nazis are out. Former Nazis cannot boss anyone else or be in a position of responsibility.'"

*Manchester Guardian*, 31-12-45.

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